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Background

The Commission on Paraoptometric Certification (CPC) was established in 2000 by the American Optometric Association. This program replaced the National Paraoptometric Registry, which was established by the American Optometric Association in 1978. Certification focuses specifically on the individual and is an indication of current proficiency in a specialized field. Certification is highly valued and provides formal acknowledgement of knowledge and skills in a particular area of practice.

The CPC offers four certification examinations for optometric staff. Each program requires successful completion of an examination prepared and administered by the CPC with the assistance of Professional Testing Corporation (PTC). The purpose of the examinations is to assure a level of knowledge to perform the functions necessary to each certified designation. Recipients must participate in continuing education activities and renew their certification every three years to maintain a current certification. Paraoptometric certification provides a formal declaration of education and skill achievement in the profession of optometric assisting by:

- Recognizing formally those individuals who meet all requirements of the Commission on Paraoptometric Certification of the American Optometric Association.
- Encouraging continued professional growth of the paraoptometric.
- Establishing and measuring the level of knowledge required for certification of paraoptometrics.
- Promoting a standard of requisite knowledge required for certification; thereby, assisting the employer, public, and members of the health professions in the assessment of paraoptometrics.

The CPOT™, CPOA™, and CPOT™ examinations are accredited by the National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA). The NCCA accreditation serves as a benchmark on how organizations should conduct certification and clearly distinguishes the excellence and value of CPC certification. To receive this accreditation, the CPC completed an application for each certification demonstrating compliance with the NCCA’s Standards for the Accreditation of Certification Programs, which were the first standards for professional certification programs developed by the industry. NCCA uses a peer review process to: establish accreditation standards; evaluate compliance with the standards; recognize organizations/programs that demonstrate compliance; and serve as a resource on quality certification.

The CPC is a member of the Institute for Credentialing Excellence, or I.C.E., a professional membership association that provides education, networking and other resources for organizations and individuals who work in and serve the credentialing industry. I.C.E. is a leading developer of standards for both certification and certificate programs and it is both a provider of and a clearing house for information on trends in certification, test development and delivery, assessment-based certificate programs and other information relevant to the credentialing industry.
Executive Summary

The Commission on Paraoptometric Certification (CPC) continues to offer the only certification available for paraoptometrics and seeks to make this experience valuable and desirable for all interested participants. During 2020, more than 7,535 paraoptometrics held or earned a new paraoptometric certification. The CPC continues to improve the quality and integrity of the program to maintain the positive perception of certification within the optometric community.

Mission Statement

The Commission on Paraoptometric Certification serves the public by developing, maintaining, and promoting a certification process which reflects current modes of optometric practice and grants certification to those candidates who satisfy the set requirements throughout the world.

Program Overview

The certified paraoptometric examinations are developed and administered by the CPC with the assistance of Professional Testing Corporation. These proctored computer-based examinations are overseen by Prometric staff. The purpose of the examinations is to ensure a level of knowledge to perform the functions of a certified paraoptometric at each appropriate level. Those who have successfully completed the appropriate examination(s) will be certified with the Commission on Paraoptometric Certification as a Certified Paraoptometric (CPO), Certified Paraoptometric Assistant (CPOA), Certified Paraoptometric Coder (CPOC), or Certified Paraoptometric Technician (CPOT).

The passing score for each examination is set annually after all examination forms have been reviewed for relevance, appropriateness, and accuracy by an appointed committee that is responsible for examination development. During the process, this committee meets with a psychometrician who serves to guide committee deliberations and ensures psychometric soundness of the decisions reached.

The primary consideration in the examination review process is to ensure representation of the basic body of knowledge required for practice. A second consideration is to maintain the equivalent difficulty level of successive examinations. Based on Standard 4.21 of the AERA, APA, and NCME Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing, the passing scores are established so that the test review committee can bring their knowledge and experience to bear in a reasonable way.

Objectives

The purpose of this Year-in-Review report is two-fold. First, it assures that the examinations are compliant with NCCA standards and assists the Commission on Paraoptometric Certification in identifying trends, targeting audiences, and ensuring that the examinations are reliable. Second, these metrics are valuable to stakeholders as they identify potential training opportunities that are lacking; personal development needs that are not being met; and identify target demographic audiences for marketing purposes. The information in this report is derived from compiled candidate responses on the examination applications and the stringent review of score reports. All documentation regarding these reports is kept on file for five (5) years. Only through extensive task analysis studies can the CPC...
determine the body of knowledge. Task analyses assess how a task is accomplished, including a detailed description of both manual and mental activities, task and element durations, frequency, allocation, complexity, necessary equipment and precautions, and any other unique factors involved in or required for one or more people to perform a given task. The CPC conducts these analyses every three to five years and the latest one was performed in 2019. In between these studies, test reviews and item performance reviews are conducted annually. Test specifications are updated frequently according to the environmental scan of the optometric practice.

Highlights

The Commission on Paraoptometric Certification is pleased to report that we have completed another year of providing certification examinations to paraoptometrics. However, the global pandemic had a negative impact on the availability of testing and the number of candidates tested due to COVID-19 restrictions that resulted in cancelation of the May 2020 examination period*. The majority of registrants for the May exam were subsequently rescheduled to later testing periods.

The examinations are developed in cooperation with Professional Testing Corporation (PTC), which provides professional organizations of all sizes with quality psychometric services. The CPO, CPOA, and CPOT programs are accredited by the National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA). The NCCA helps to ensure the health, welfare, and safety of the public through the accreditation of a variety of certification programs/organizations that assess professional competency.

• In 2020, a total of 1,104 candidates sat for a CPO, CPOA, CPOT, or CPOC examination.
  • At the end of December 2020, approximately 6,262 paraoptometrics maintained a current certification. (After those paraoptometrics who did not renew their certification in 2020 were removed from the total count.)
  • 4,260 Certified Paraoptometrics (CPO)
  • 1,275 Certified Paraoptometric Assistants (CPOA)
  • 497 Certified Paraoptometric Technicians (CPOT)
  • 230 Certified Paraoptometric Coders (CPOC)
  • Of the total certified, 186 held dual certifications (CPOC with a CPO, CPOA or CPOT)

* Six candidates were able to obtain appointments for the CPO examination in May 2020.
All examinations administered in 2020 were computer-based and were offered during four, two-week testing periods in February, May**, August, and November at Prometric testing locations.

** Overall Pass/Fail **

The majority of the 1,104 candidates who took an examination in 2020 (78%) passed.

** 2020 Candidate Pass/Fail Rate **

- **Pass**: 78%
- **Fail**: 22%

** Overall passing rate dropped 6% from 2019 **

** The May examinations period was canceled. However, six candidates were able to obtain examination appointments and tested during the May 2020 testing period. **
**Year in Review**

**Education Level**

The trend in the education level continued with most candidates (61%) holding a minimum of a high school diploma or equivalent. One-third (33%) of candidates held an Associate’s, Bachelor’s, or Master’s degree, while only six percent (6%) of candidates were enrolled or were graduates of a CPC or ACOE approved optometric assistant or technician program.
Year in Review

Employment Setting

Overall, 81% of candidates (a slight increase since 2019) were employed by a private practice. Of the 896 candidates in this category, 78% or 703 paraoptometrics passed the CPO, CPOA, CPOT, or CPOC examination on the first or second attempt, representing a 6% decrease in the pass rate of candidates employed by a private practice since 2019.

2020 Candidate Employment Setting

Employment in private practice settings rose slightly, up about 1% from 2019.
The most predominant employment setting for candidates taking any paraoptometric examinations remains the optometric private practice.

The pass rate fell 6% for those employed by a private practice.
Candidate Age

A little less than half the candidates (47%) were between the ages of 25-39, one quarter (25%) were under the age of 25, and the remaining 28% were over the age of 40. A 5% decrease was recognized in the number of candidates testing in 2020 in the age group of between 25-39, down from 52% in 2019.

The percentage of candidates over the age of 40 increased from 25% in 2019 to 28% in 2020.
The age group scoring highest was the 60+ group with an 85.7% passing rate. Those in the 25-29 and 30-39 age groups both had a 79% passing rate, followed by the under 25 age group with a 76% pass rate. Those in the 40-49 age group averaged a 73.5% passing rate.
Candidate Gender

In 2020, of the 957 respondents who identified their gender, the percentage of male candidates declined slightly from the previous year. In 2019, 7.6% of the candidates who identified their gender were male. Only 7.1% of the respondents who identified their gender in 2020 were male. However, a higher rate of respondents chose not to identify their gender than in the previous year.

Of the candidates who indicated gender, there was no significant difference in the pass rate based on gender: 75% of male and 77.5% of female candidates passed their examination. However, these pass rates are significantly lower than they were in 2019 when the pass rates for male and female candidates was approximately 84%.
Candidate Race

Of those who indicated race on their application, Caucasians accounted for 64% of all candidates. Hispanics made up 12% of the candidate pool, with the remaining 8% of respondents being comprised of African American, Asian, and Native American candidates, while 16% marked no response. These statistics are nearly identical to 2019 candidate breakdowns.

Of the candidates who identified their race as Asian, their pass rate remained consistently high at 89.6%, followed by 79.2% of candidates identified as Caucasians, down from 86% in 2019.
State Statistics
The top five states with the most exam candidates in 2020 were Texas, Florida, Oklahoma, Indiana and North Carolina.

For the sixth consecutive year, Texas produced the greatest number of candidates. Florida edged out Indiana and took second place while Oklahoma again brought in the third highest number of candidates.
**Reason for Certification**
Employer-required certification at the CPO, CPOA and CPOT level remained consistent with previous years at 63%, while 29% of candidates again indicated they were self-motivated to sit for the exam. Regardless of the reason for taking an examination, 77.6% of the candidates passed.

**2020 Candidate Reason for Certification (CPO/A/T)**

- **Employer**: 63%
- **Self**: 29%
- **Colleague**: 2%
- **Coworker**: 1%
- **Other**: 5%

**2020 Candidate Pass/Fail Rate by Reason (CPO/A/T)**

- **Employer**:
  - Pass: 539
  - Fail: 155
- **Self**:
  - Pass: 252
  - Fail: 81
- **Colleague**:
  - Pass: 39
  - Fail: 8
- **Coworker**:
  - Pass: 16
  - Fail: 1
- **Other**:
  - Pass: 11
  - Fail: 2
In 2020, 54% of CPOC candidates were self-motivated to sit for the exam, but employer influence remained a factor at 46% while coworkers reportedly had no influence again on the decision.

There was a marked drop in the passing percentage of candidates who were self-motivated to become CPOC certified. In 2019, 100% of self-motivated CPOC candidates passed and in 2020 only 73% passed. The percent of passing candidates who were urged by their employer to test also fell from 78% in 2019 to only 59% in 2020.
Certification Renewal

In 2020, despite a pandemic when in-person education was in short supply, 44% of the 2,270 certifications that were due for renewal were completed. The renewal statistics showed that 528 CPOs (35%) renewed their certification, while 277 CPOAs (57%), 136 CPOTs (71%) and 53 CPOCs (54%) have been renewed until 2023. The overall renewal rate of 44% of the eligible certificants is consistent with the last four renewal periods that averaged between 39-45%.

The following maps depict the number of renewals by state or Canadian province. No Canadian CPOs renewed a certification. Two CPOAs from British Columbia, one from Manitoba, one from Ontario, and one CPOT in Alberta renewed.
Year in Review

Canadian CPOA & CPOT Renewals by Province

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Certified Paraoptometric (CPO) Exam

The CPO examination is comprised of 100 scored multiple-choice questions. A minimum score of 75% is required to pass. The examination is divided into four domains: basic science (27%), clinical principles and procedures (35%), ophthalmic optics and dispensing (20%), and professional issues (18%). A total of 798 candidates sat for the CPO examination in 2020 and 82.9% received a passing score. The lowest score reported was 43% and the highest was 100%.

Nearly three-quarters (73%) of CPO, CPOA, and CPOT candidates who tested in 2020 had between one and five years of experience, with only 9% having less than one year of experience. This is a noticeable decrease from 2019 when 30% of the candidates reported having less than 1 year of experience.
Certified Paraoptometric Assistant (CPOA) Exam

The CPOA examination is comprised of 200 scored multiple-choice questions. A minimum score of 70% is required to pass. The examination is divided into six domains: office operations (15%), ophthalmic optics and dispensing (20%), testing and procedures (18%), special procedures (17%), refractive status of the eye and binocularity (13%), and basic ocular anatomy and physiology (17%). A total of 156 candidates sat for the CPOA examination in 2020 and 78.8% of them passed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>First Time Candidates</th>
<th>High Score</th>
<th>Low Score</th>
<th>Average % Correct</th>
<th>Repeat Candidates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pass</td>
<td>Fail</td>
<td>Pass</td>
<td>Fail</td>
<td>Pass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February</td>
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<td>78%</td>
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<td>May</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Again, the majority of candidates testing at all three levels (CPO, CPOA and CPOT) had between one and five years of experience.
Certified Paraoptometric Technician (CPOT) Exam – Written

The CPOT Written examination is comprised of 225 scored multiple-choice questions. A minimum score of 69% is required to pass. The examination is divided into six domains: pre-testing procedures (20%), clinical procedures (28%), ophthalmic optics and dispensing (18%), refractive status of the eye and binocularity (12%), anatomy and physiology (15%), and practice management (7%). A total of 56 candidates sat for the CPOT Written examination in 2020. Forty-two, or 75%, of testers passed their written examination.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>First Time Candidates</th>
<th>High Score</th>
<th>Low Score</th>
<th>Average % Correct</th>
<th>Repeat Candidates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pass</td>
<td>Fail</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Pass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>77%</td>
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<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>76%</td>
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</table>

Certified Paraoptometric Technician (CPOT) Exam – Clinical

The CPOT Clinical examination is comprised of 100 scored multiple-choice questions. A minimum score of 75% is required to pass. The examination is divided into four domains: case history scenarios (10%), pre-testing procedures (30%), special procedures (30%), and optical dispensing techniques and recording (30%). A total of 58 candidates sat for the CPOT Clinical examination in 2020 and 69% of them passed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>First Time Candidates</th>
<th>High Score</th>
<th>Low Score</th>
<th>Average % Correct</th>
<th>Repeat Candidates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pass</td>
<td>Fail</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Pass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>77%</td>
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<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
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</table>
The majority of candidates testing at the CPOT level indicated one to five years of experience, followed by five to ten years of experience. The candidate claiming less than one year of experience is likely a graduate of an approved optometric technician program.
Certified Paraoptometric Coding (CPOC) Exam

The CPOC examination is comprised of 125 multiple-choice questions. A minimum score of 70% is required to pass. The examination is divided into seven domains: anatomy and physiology (8%), medical terminology (8%), review of Current Procedural Terminology® (22%), diagnosis codes (24%), medical records (14%), claim filing (12%), and compliance (12%). A total of 38 candidates sat for the CPOC examination in 2020 and 73.7% passed the examination.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>First Time Candidates</th>
<th>High Score</th>
<th>Low Score</th>
<th>Average % Correct</th>
<th>Repeat Candidates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pass</td>
<td>Fail</td>
<td>Pass</td>
<td>Fail</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>73%</td>
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<tr>
<td>May</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The experience level for the CPOCs testing in 2020 was predominantly at the minimum requirement of two years of experience. Just over one-third (36%) of the CPOC candidates had three to five years of experience, while only (12%) had more than 5 years of experience. These statistics show a noticeable shift in the experience level of candidates testing in 2020, when in 2019 the three experience levels were nearly equal.